

# The Power of Nursery Rhymes in Language Acquisition

## Research Ethics Review Application

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Ethics Review Committee  
Toronto Metropolitan University  
Course-Based Research Ethics Committee (FA-CBREC)

## 1. Project Information: Course Number, Course Name, Student Name, Project Title

**Course Number:** LIR 800

**Course Name:** Topics in Intercultural Relations

**Student Name:** Fatima Salah

**Project Title:** *Tales and Tunes: The Power of Nursery Rhymes in Language Acquisition*

## 2. Student Self-Assessment Checklist (Complete and then verify the following in writing):

I Fatima Salah have read and understood the document “Responsibilities of Undergraduate Students as Researchers...” and am in full agreement to comply

I Fatima Salah have read and understood the article “Ethics on the Ground: A Moral Compass” and am in full agreement to comply.

## 3. Proposed dates to begin and end collecting data

**Start Date:** October 17, 2024

**End Date:** October 31, 2024

## 4. Project completion date

**Date:** November 12, 2024

## 5. Purpose of project

The goal of this project is to help adult learners of French improve their pronunciation by focusing on common mistakes and bad habits they’ve developed during their learning process. Pronunciation is one of the most challenging aspects of learning a language, especially French, which has several sounds and phonetic rules that don’t exist in many other languages. Learners often struggle with specific sounds, such as nasal vowels (on, an), the French “r,” and differences between vowel sounds like é and è. These mispronunciations, if left uncorrected, can become ingrained and harder to fix later on.

To address this, the project will use nursery rhymes as a tool for pronunciation practice. Nursery rhymes are an excellent resource because they are simple, repetitive, and musical, making it easier for learners to focus on how words are pronounced. The rhythm and melody in these rhymes help reinforce correct

pronunciation in a natural and enjoyable way. In this project, participants will work with selected French nursery rhymes that highlight common pronunciation difficulties. By repeating these rhymes, learners will have the chance to break bad habits and develop better pronunciation skills.

The project aims to show how music and rhythm can support learning, especially for adult learners who may feel self-conscious or stuck with their current pronunciation. Nursery rhymes create a fun and low-pressure environment where learners can focus on the sounds of the language without worrying about grammar or vocabulary. This method is based on the idea that when language learning is tied to music and rhythm, it becomes easier for the brain to remember and process the sounds.

By participating in this study, adult learners will become more aware of the specific areas in their pronunciation that need improvement. The project will provide them with practical strategies they can use in their own time to practice and self-correct. Over time, this will not only improve their pronunciation but also their overall fluency and confidence in speaking French.

This research also explores how using culturally significant materials like nursery rhymes can help adult learners connect more deeply with the language. These rhymes are a part of everyday life in French-speaking cultures, so practicing with them can also give learners a sense of the rhythm and intonation that are natural to the language. In the long run, this approach could help learners retain more information and adapt their pronunciation to sound more like native speakers.

Ultimately, the project seeks to help learners move beyond the bad habits they've developed and reach a new level of language proficiency. By focusing on specific problem areas and providing effective tools for self-correction, the study aims to show how pronunciation can be improved in a way that is engaging, enjoyable, and sustainable for long-term learning.

## 6. Project methodology

This project will adopt a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both primary and secondary data collection. The primary data will be gathered directly from participants through personal interaction and controlled pronunciation exercises. The secondary data will be collected from existing research on language acquisition, phonetics, and the influence of cultural backgrounds on language learning. Together, these methods will help explore how adult learners of French can improve their pronunciation through targeted exercises and how their intercultural experiences influence their learning journey.

## Primary Data Collection

The core of this project is the primary data collection, which focuses on directly engaging with participants through two main activities: pronunciation training using nursery rhymes and semi-structured interviews about their language learning experiences and cultural backgrounds. These steps aim to explore not only the pronunciation improvement but also how participants' cultural and linguistic diversity affects their French learning process.

### 6. 1. Participant Selection

The study will include 6 to 8 adult participants who are currently learning French at an intermediate level. These participants will be selected from local language classes or community groups and will reflect a variety of cultural backgrounds. A key element of this project is understanding how participants' family environments, exposure to different languages, and cultural heritage influence their learning. The selection criteria will ensure that participants represent different linguistic and cultural experiences, as these factors are expected to play a role in their pronunciation challenges.

### 6. 2. Data Collection Sessions

The data collection will consist of several sessions with each participant. The sessions will include:

- Initial Pronunciation Assessment: In the first session, participants will be asked to read a short French passage aloud. This will be recorded and analyzed to identify their baseline pronunciation, highlighting specific issues such as mispronunciations of nasal vowels, the French "r," or distinctions between vowels like é and è. This initial recording will serve as a reference point for measuring progress throughout the study.
- Pronunciation Training with Nursery Rhymes: Over the course of four sessions, participants will engage in pronunciation exercises using nursery rhymes. Nursery rhymes have been chosen for their simple, repetitive, and rhythmic nature, which helps with phonetic accuracy. Participants will practice these rhymes both in the sessions and at home. Each session will be recorded to track progress, focusing on how participants adjust their pronunciation over time. Special attention will be given to whether they self-correct previous mistakes, how they engage with the rhythm and melody, and whether these strategies help them overcome their pronunciation challenges.

### 6. 3. Semi-Structured Interviews on Intercultural Background

To explore the intercultural aspect of the project, each participant will participate in a 30-45 minute interview. These interviews will focus on their personal experiences learning French, with an emphasis on how their family environment, cultural background, and exposure to other languages have influenced their language learning journey. The interview will cover topics such as:

- Their family background and the role of languages in their household growing up.
- Whether they grew up in a multilingual environment or a monolingual one, and how this impacted their French learning.

- The other languages they speak fluently, if any, and whether the phonetic structures of those languages have influenced their ability to learn and pronounce French.
- Their experiences learning French in different cultural settings (e.g., studying abroad, in school, or in community-based language programs).
- The influence of their **cultural heritage** and attitudes toward language learning, including whether certain cultural values or familial expectations have shaped their approach to mastering French.

These interviews will allow participants to reflect on how their cultural and linguistic backgrounds shape their French learning experience. The data gathered will be transcribed and analyzed for common themes, particularly how intercultural experiences impact pronunciation and overall language learning strategies.

## 6. 4. Observation During Pronunciation Training

Throughout the pronunciation training, observations will be made on how participants engage with the nursery rhymes and the learning process in general. Notes will be taken on their behavior, emotional responses, and strategies for pronunciation correction. Observational data will include details like:

- How often participants self-correct their pronunciation.
- Whether they engage more with the melody and rhythm of the rhymes to improve pronunciation.
- Their confidence level and motivation to improve their skills during the sessions.

These qualitative observations will provide valuable insight into the learning behaviors of adult learners and how pronunciation training can be adapted to suit their needs.

## 6. 5. Final Pronunciation Assessment

At the end of the training, participants will be asked to read the same French passage they read during the initial assessment. This second recording will be compared to the baseline recording to measure progress. Improvements will be evaluated in terms of accuracy, fluency, and correction of specific errors identified earlier.

## 6. 6. Post-Training Interviews

After completing the pronunciation training, participants will have a final interview to reflect on their progress. They will discuss:

- How the pronunciation training helped them.
- Whether they felt their cultural background played a role in their learning process.
- Any remaining difficulties they still face with French pronunciation.

These follow-up interviews will provide an opportunity for participants to assess their own development and give further insight into the cultural dimensions of language learning.

## Secondary Data Collection

Alongside the primary data, this project will also rely on secondary data from existing research on French language acquisition and pronunciation improvement techniques. Secondary data will provide a theoretical framework and context for analyzing the participants' progress.

### 6.1 1. Literature Review

A detailed review of relevant literature on second language acquisition and phonetic training will inform the project's analysis. This will include studies that explore:

- Pronunciation challenges for adult learners of French.
- The role of rhythm and melody (such as nursery rhymes) in improving phonetic accuracy.
- Research on how cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence language learning, particularly in pronunciation.

### 6.1 2. Comparing Pronunciation Improvement Strategies

The secondary data will include a review of existing methods for pronunciation improvement, particularly techniques involving rhythm, repetition, and melody. By comparing these methods to the nursery rhyme exercises used in this study, the project will assess the effectiveness of this approach in helping adult learners correct their pronunciation.

### 6.1 3. Intercultural Influence in Language Learning

Secondary research will also explore how intercultural relations impact language acquisition, focusing on how exposure to multiple languages or different cultural environments influences pronunciation learning. This data will provide a broader context for understanding how participants' diverse cultural backgrounds affect their learning process.

## Data Analysis

The final phase of the project will involve analyzing both the primary and secondary data to answer the research questions. The analysis will follow a structured approach:

## 1. Qualitative Analysis

The interview transcripts and observational notes from the pronunciation training will be coded for recurring themes. These themes may include:

- The influence of participants' multilingual environments on their ability to learn French pronunciation.
- Patterns of self-correction and engagement with rhythmic learning methods.
- Emotional and psychological factors, such as participants' confidence and motivation levels.

## 2. Phonetic Analysis

The audio recordings from both the initial and final pronunciation assessments will be analyzed for improvements. This analysis will focus on specific pronunciation challenges identified earlier, such as nasal vowels and the French "r." Changes in accuracy, fluency, and consistency will be measured and compared to determine the effectiveness of the nursery rhyme training.

## 3. Comparative Analysis

The results from the primary data collection will be compared to the findings from the secondary data. This comparison will allow the project to identify whether the improvements observed in this study align with or differ from those found in existing research on adult language learners.

## 7. Statement on what aspects of your methodology do and do not require review approval

The aspects of this project that **require review approval** include the **collection of primary data** from participants who are adult learners of French. This involves direct interaction with individuals for the purpose of gathering data through semi-structured interviews and controlled pronunciation exercises. Since these participants are not students enrolled in the course, and the data being collected (such as audio recordings and interview transcripts) are not publicly available, this component of the project requires approval. Specifically, the following activities necessitate review:

- **Interviews with participants:** These interviews aim to explore participants' personal journeys in learning French, their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and how these factors influence their learning. Since this involves collecting private and personal experiences, it requires ethical review.
- **Pronunciation assessments and exercises:** The project will gather audio data during both initial and final pronunciation assessments, as well as during the nursery rhyme training sessions. This primary data collection from human participants also requires review approval as it involves direct engagement and the recording of personal speech data.

Aspects that **do not require review approval** include the **secondary data collection and analysis**, which involves the use of publicly available research and datasets. The secondary data, such as literature on second language acquisition, pronunciation improvement methods, and the impact of cultural backgrounds on language learning, is freely accessible and does not involve private information or direct engagement with human participants. Additionally, observational activities during the pronunciation training, where no expectation of privacy is breached, do not require approval. These observations are part of the controlled research environment with participants' full knowledge and consent.

## 8. Copy of data collection instruments to be used (e.g., survey questionnaires, interview questions)

Here are the key questions that will guide the interviews:

### 1. Personal Background

- Can you tell me about your background and where you grew up?
- What languages did you speak at home, and how do they influence your French learning?

### 2. Language Learning Journey

- How long have you been learning French?
- What motivated you to learn this language?
- Can you describe your learning process and the methods you've used?

### 3. Pronunciation Challenges

- What specific pronunciation challenges have you encountered?
- Are there particular sounds or words that you find difficult to pronounce? If so, which ones?

### 4. Cultural Influences

- How do you think your cultural background has influenced your approach to learning French?
- Have you encountered any cultural elements in French language learning that resonate with your own experiences?

### 5. Support Systems

- What resources or support systems (e.g., family, teachers, language apps) have helped you in your learning journey?



- How do you feel about the effectiveness of these resources in improving your pronunciation?

## **2. Pronunciation Assessment Exercises**

To assess the participants' pronunciation, a set of specific exercises will be utilized during the training sessions. These exercises will include:

- **Nursery Rhyme Recitation:** Participants will recite a selection of French nursery rhymes, focusing on particular sounds and rhythms. The rhymes will be chosen for their phonetic diversity to challenge various pronunciation aspects.
- **Targeted Pronunciation Drills:** Specific drills that concentrate on sounds commonly problematic for adult learners (e.g., nasal sounds, liaison, and vowel distinctions) will be conducted. These drills will be designed to highlight areas where participants typically struggle.

## **3. Audio Recording Equipment**

To facilitate accurate pronunciation assessments, audio recording equipment will be used to capture participants' spoken responses. This equipment will include:

- **Microphones:** Microphones will be utilized to ensure clear audio capture during interviews and pronunciation exercises.
- **Recording Software:** Software will be employed to record and playback the sessions, allowing for later analysis of pronunciation improvements.

## **9. Description of participants: how sampled, how enlisted**

The participants for this project will consist of eight adult learners of French who are at varying proficiency levels. They will be recruited through local language schools and online language learning communities. To ensure a diverse range of experiences, potential participants will be sampled based on their linguistic backgrounds and previous exposure to the French language. Interested individuals will be invited to participate via an introductory email outlining the project's purpose and requirements.

## **10. Description of procedures in which participants will participate**

Participants will engage in two primary procedures:

1. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Each participant will partake in a 30-45 minute interview where they will discuss their language learning journey, including their backgrounds, challenges, and resources. These interviews will be recorded with the participant's consent for later analysis.
2. **Pronunciation Exercises:** Following the interviews, participants will complete a series of pronunciation assessments, including reciting selected French nursery rhymes and targeted pronunciation drills. These exercises will be conducted in a controlled environment, and their performances will be audio recorded for evaluation.

## 11. A risk/benefit analysis

**Risks:** The primary risks associated with this project involve potential discomfort or anxiety during interviews and pronunciation assessments, as participants may feel self-conscious about their language skills. However, efforts will be made to create a supportive environment and reassure participants that their progress is the focus of the study.

**Benefits:** The benefits of participation include personalized feedback on pronunciation and insights into language learning processes. Participants may gain a better understanding of their pronunciation challenges and receive resources to improve their skills. Additionally, the study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to the field of language acquisition, particularly regarding the impact of cultural backgrounds on learning outcomes.

## 12. Statement of recruitment information to be given to participants (summary + appendix)

**Summary:** When recruiting participants, they will receive a brief overview of the study's purpose, including its focus on exploring the impact of cultural backgrounds on French language learning and improving pronunciation skills. The recruitment materials will clearly outline what participation entails, including involvement in a semi-structured interview and pronunciation exercises. Participants will be informed about their rights, including confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Additionally, they will be made aware of the potential benefits of participation, such as personalized feedback on their language skills and contributions to research in the field of language acquisition. Interested individuals will receive contact information for any questions or concerns.

**Appendix:** Full recruitment materials will be included as appendices, consisting of:

- A recruitment email template that will be sent to potential participants.
- Informational flyers that summarize the study and how to get involved, highlighting key details about the project, participation requirements, and the contact information for the researcher.

## 13. Statement of methods and appropriateness of methods of obtaining consent

**Methods of Obtaining Consent:** Consent will be obtained through both written and verbal methods. Prior to participation, individuals will be provided with a consent form outlining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions before signing the form. Verbal consent will be obtained during the initial contact to confirm their willingness to participate, especially for those who may prefer a more informal approach. Implied consent will be considered in cases where participants engage with the research activities after being informed of the study details.

**Appropriateness of Methods:** These methods are appropriate for the study as they ensure that participants fully understand their rights and the nature of their involvement. The combination of written and verbal consent accommodates different preferences and promotes transparency in the research process, fostering a respectful and ethical research environment.

#### 14. Copy of consent form or information on how consent will be obtained (summary + appendix)

**Summary:** Consent will be obtained by providing participants with a detailed consent form that outlines the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participants will be asked to read the form carefully, and they will have the opportunity to ask questions before signing. Verbal consent will also be documented to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. This two-pronged approach ensures that participants are well-informed and comfortable with their involvement.

**Appendix:** A copy of the consent form will be attached as an appendix, which will include:

- The title of the study
- The researcher's contact information
- Detailed information about the study's purpose and procedures
- A statement on confidentiality and data protection
- A section for participants to sign, indicating their consent to participate and their understanding of the study's requirements.

#### 15. Description of methods to be adopted to protect the right of participants to privacy, anonymity, and/or confidentiality for the research components summarized above.

To ensure participants privacy, we will take the following steps:

- **Removing Identifying Information:** We will not include any personal details in our data analysis. Participants will be given fake names, and any specific demographic information that could identify them will be generalized or left out.
- **Secure Data Storage:** All data will be safely stored on Google Drive. Only the primary investigator and Dr. Jamin Pelkey will have access, and the data will be protected with passwords to keep it secure.
- **Keeping Information Confidential:** Participants will be assured that their data will only be used for research purposes. We will report findings in a way that keeps their identities hidden.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participants can choose to stop participating at any time without any negative consequences for their relationship with Toronto Metropolitan University or the researchers.

## 16. Description of feedback to be given to participants (debriefing, summary of results, etc.)

**Debriefing Session:** After we finish collecting data, we will hold a session where participants can learn about the study's purpose and what we found. This will help them understand how their input contributed to the research.

**Summary of Results:** Those interested will receive a simple summary of the research results via email, highlighting the key findings and what they mean.

**Opportunity for Questions:** Participants will have a chance to ask questions during the debriefing and through follow-up emails, ensuring they feel informed and engaged throughout the research process.

## 17. Appendices and references (as relevant to individual projects).

### Appendix A: Sample Consent Form

You are being invited to participate in a research activity. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

**TITLE OF THE RESEARCH ACTIVITY:** Cultural Influences on French Language Learning

**INVESTIGATORS:** This research activity is being conducted by Fatima Salah, a student at Toronto Metropolitan University, under the supervision of Dr. Jamin Pelkey from the Department of Languages, Literatures & Cultures. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Dr. Jamin Pelkey at [jpelkey@torontomu.ca](mailto:jpelkey@torontomu.ca).

**PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH ACTIVITY:** This research aims to assess how cultural backgrounds affect pronunciation skills in French language learning. I will recruit approximately 20 participants who are between the ages of 18-29 and currently enrolled as undergraduate students.

**WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO:** If you volunteer to participate in this research activity, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in a semi-structured interview lasting about 30-45 minutes.
- Discuss your experiences learning French and how your cultural background may influence your language learning.
- Sample questions may include:
  - What challenges have you faced while learning French?
  - How do you think your cultural background influences your language learning?

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS:** While I cannot guarantee benefits, participants may receive personalized feedback on their language skills and contribute to research in the field of language acquisition.

**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:** The research project is low-risk. You may reflect on personal experiences that could evoke discomfort. If you feel uncomfortable, you can skip any question or stop participation at any time.

**YOUR IDENTITY WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL:** Your identity and information will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying information will be included in the results. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names when discussing sample responses. Data collected will be stored securely for one year.

**INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:** You will not be paid for taking part in this research activity.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:** Participation is completely voluntary. You may skip questions or withdraw at any time without any disadvantages.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH ACTIVITY:** If you have any questions about the research, please ask now or contact me later.

Fatima Salah: fatima.salah@torontomu.ca

Dr. Jamin Pelkey: jpelkey@torontomu.ca

This research has been reviewed by the Toronto Metropolitan University Research Ethics Board (FA-CBREC-2022-001). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact:

Course-Based Research Ethics Committee  
Toronto Metropolitan University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
arts.ethics@torontomu.ca

## **Appendix B: Sample Recruitment Email**

**Subject:** Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Hello [Participant's Name],

My name is Fatima Salah, and I am a student at Toronto Metropolitan University in the Department of Languages, Literatures & Cultures. I am contacting you to see if you might be interested in participating in my research project.

This project is being done as part of my course requirement, supervised by Dr. Jamin Pelkey. The focus of the project is to explore how cultural backgrounds influence pronunciation in French language learning.

To participate, you need to be between the ages of 18-29 and a current undergraduate student. If you agree to volunteer, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview, which will last about 30-45 minutes. During the interview, I will ask questions about your language learning experiences and your cultural background, which may include sample questions like:

- What challenges have you faced while learning French?
- How do you think your cultural background influences your language learning?

Your participation is completely voluntary, and if you choose not to participate, it will not impact our relationship or your relationship with Toronto Metropolitan University.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Course-Based Research Ethics Committee in the Toronto Met Faculty of Arts (FA-CBREC-2022-001).

If you are interested in learning more about the research activity or would like to volunteer, please reply to this email.

Sincerely,  
Fatima Salah  
BA Student

## **Appendix C: Participant Feedback Form**

Thank you for participating in our research project! Your feedback is important to us and will help improve future studies. Please take a moment to share your thoughts.

1. How did you hear about this research study?

- ☐ Email
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Word of Mouth
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What was your initial impression of the research project?

- ☐ Very Positive
- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Neutral

- ☐ Negative
- ☐ Very Negative

3. How comfortable did you feel during the participation process?

- ☐ Very Comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very Uncomfortable

4. Did you feel that your privacy and confidentiality were respected?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ If no, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What did you find most interesting or valuable about the study?

- \_\_\_\_\_

6. Were there any aspects of the study that you found confusing or unclear?

- \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you have any suggestions for improving the research process or experience for future participants?

- \_\_\_\_\_

8. Would you be willing to participate in future studies related to this topic?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

9. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

- \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your feedback!

## References

De Temple, J. M., & Snow, C. E. (2003). The Role of Nursery Rhymes in the Development of Language Skills: A Review of the Literature. *Early Education and Development*, 14(5), 651-674.

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Zuckerman, B., & Coyle, S. M. (2020). The Impact of Musical Rhythm on Language Acquisition in Young Children. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 57(2), 143-159.